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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MADRID 001879

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: U.S.-SPAIN COUNCIL: MOD BONO EXPRESSES "PERSONAL
OPPOSITION" TO LIFTING EU CHINA ARMS EMBARGO

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathy Fitzpatrick; reason 1.4 (B)

1. (C) Summary. The U.S.-Spain Council, a private bi-national NGO dedicated to strengthening U.S.-Spain relations, held its tenth annual meeting May 13-16 in Seville. Participants included U.S. Council Chairman Senator Chris Dodd, EUR DAS Glyn Davies, Charge Manzanares, Spanish Minister of Defense Jose Bono, Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, Spain Council Chairman Antonio Garrigues, regional political officials, and business leaders from both countries. Prince Felipe hosted a dinner for meeting participants on the second evening of the event. The most newsworthy development during the Council meetings was Minister of Defense Bono's strong, but personal, public support for maintaining the EU China arms embargo (while making clear that FM Moratinos had the final word on Spain's position on the arms embargo) and his acknowledgement that he may have committed "errors" during his tenure as MOD, a reference to his statements/measures that have upset U.S.-Spain bilateral relations. Bono informed Charge that he had made both comments at the request of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. Separately, Moratinos urged the creation of a U.S.-Spain bilateral commission to meet at the ministerial level on an annual basis to discuss regional issues of mutual concern, as well as recommending other measures to enhance bilateral relations. While the comments of both ministers were largely positive, veiled swipes at opposition support for U.S. policy in Iraq reflected a continuing temptation to drag the USG into domestic political debates. End Summary.

//DEFENSE MINISTER ON CHINA ARMS EMBARGO//

2. (C) Bono used a speech to participants in the tenth annual meeting of the U.S.-Spain Council to announce his personal opposition to the lifting of the EU arms embargo on China. He said that it did not make sense to lift the arms embargo now simply because "a particular EU country wants to sell weapons to China." Bono told Charge privately that he had made this statement to honor a request made by Secretary Rumsfeld during their May 3 meeting in Washington that Bono make public his views on the China arms embargo.

3. (C) While Bono was careful to note in his speech that FM Moratinos had the ultimate word on the China arms issue within the Spanish government, his comments nonetheless created a stir during an otherwise routine meeting of the Council. Charge learned that FM Moratinos and Socialist Party Director for International Relations Trinidad Jimenez called Bono after his speech to criticize the way he had framed the issue. Bono's comments came just hours after Moratinos' elaboration of a more nuanced position that tracks with that of its EU allies (see para 9.) Bono's statement apparently came as a surprise to members of his staff as well; an MOD contact called Embassy's Spanish-national political assistant (who was present for the speech) to verify Bono's declaration.

4. (C) Separately, Bono said during his speech that he may have committed "errors" during his tenure as Defense Minister and attributed these mistakes to his lack of experience in the MOD role. Bono told Charge that this admission, like his comments opposing the lifting of the EU China arms embargo, came at the urging of Secretary Rumsfeld. Bono made clear that he wanted Secretary Rumsfeld to be informed that he had complied with both requests.

5. (C) Bono's comments were not uniformly positive. He said international peace could not be achieved "without the U.S. or without the legitimacy (conferred by) the United Nations," an implicit defense of the Zapatero government's withdrawal of troops from Iraq on the grounds that the intervention lacked a UN mandate. Also, Bono made a general comment to the effect that his Jesuit education had taught him that "the ends do not always justify the means." (NOTE: Emboffs in attendance interpreted this as a veiled criticism of the Iraq conflict and of the opposition Popular Party's decision to join the U.S.-led coalition. END NOTE.)

//FOREIGN MINISTER CALLS FOR FORMATION OF U.S.-SPAIN
BILATERAL COMMISSION//

6. (U) Moratinos made a wide-ranging speech on U.S.-EU relations and praised President Bush's expression of support for a strong Europe during his February visit to Brussels.

He said NATO remained Europe's primary security organization and argued that there was no contradiction between a strong NATO and the elaboration of a common EU security and defense policy. Moratinos recommended increased personnel exchanges between the U.S. and the EU and the formation of an "EU caucus" in the U.S. Senate as mechanisms for further strengthening U.S.-EU ties. Moratinos lauded the USG role in the international community, particularly its part in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

17. (U) The most notable element of Moratinos' speech was his call for the establishment of a permanent U.S.-Spain bilateral commission to meet at least once a year at the ministerial level for discussions on regional issues, particularly on Latin America, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean basin. Moratinos suggested other measures for strengthening U.S.-Spanish relations, including:

- joint initiatives to promote shared democratic values in North Africa and the Middle East;

- the reinforcement of institutional contacts, for example through events such as the June 6-10 visit to Washington by members of the Spanish Parliamentary Commission on International Relations;

- increased education exchanges to promote mutual understanding;

- the establishment of a joint scientific/industrial research and development institution; and,

- the formation of a joint business organization by private sector members of the U.S.-Spain Council.

18. (U) Moratinos described current U.S.-Spain relations in positive terms. He noted Spain's participation in peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, and Afghanistan and said Spain could be an important partner for the USG in other areas as well. Moratinos said Spain's advantages included its place as the world's eight largest economy ("bigger than that of G-8 member Canada"), its influence in Latin America, North Africa, and the Middle East, and Spain's role in the fight against terrorism.

19. (U) While focused on positive aspects of the bilateral relationship, Moratinos' speech also touched briefly on points of friction. He said Spain had "recovered the capacity to engage" the Cuban and Venezuelan governments, overcoming the tensions those relationships suffered during the Aznar administration. He insisted that Spain was not pursuing dialogue as an end in itself, but seeking increased influence in order to advocate for improved human rights practices on the part of the Cuban government and to preserve the rights that still exist in Venezuela. On the EU China arms embargo, Moratinos noted that any arms sales would be governed by strict EU controls, but said Beijing had to take steps to improve human rights conditions before this issue could move forward.

//PP PARTICIPANT TAKES SHOTS AT ZAPATERO//

110. (U) Popular Party leader Mariano Rajoy declined an invitation to participate in the Council meetings, but PP Parliamentary spokesman on international relations Gustavo Aristegui did attend and mounted a withering attack on Zapatero's handling of U.S.-Spain relations. Aristegui said the GOS was now taking steps to correct its early mistakes, but without publicly acknowledging that it had committed grave errors. His Socialist counterpart Rafael Estrella (considered among the more pro-U.S. Socialist parliamentarians) fired back, asking how the USG would view it if a former president visited Europe to militate unceasingly against the policies of an incumbent administration. (NOTE: Both Aristegui and Estrella will be part of the Parliamentary delegation that will visit Washington June 6-10. They have invited Charge to meet with them prior to their departure to review their agenda for the visit.)

//COMMENT//

111. (C) MOD Bono is among the most popular Spanish politicians and his speech before the U.S.-Spain Council demonstrated his rhetorical skills. He used the presence of the media and USG officials to comply with assurances he had reportedly made to Secretary Rumsfeld, while leaving to FM Moratinos the unpleasant duty of clarifying Spain's official position on the EU China arms embargo. For now, the GOS has evidently opted not to clarify the matter publicly in order to avoid the appearance of internal discord. More broadly, we note that both Bono and Moratinos continue to fight a two-front political battle with the opposition PP, on the one hand claiming that relations with the USG are as strong as ever, and on the other casting PP support for USG policies in Iraq as somehow illegitimate and contrary to international

law. GOS officials have clearly tempered their public statements on Iraq in the last five months, but our efforts to keep them from dragging the USG into their domestic political battles remain a work in progress.

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